

Malvern Hill
Richmond vicinity
Henrico County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-⁸⁹~~137~~

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office
for Southeast Unit

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MALVERN HILL

Malvern Hill, Charles City County, Virginia

Remains ✓

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Date of erection: Probably seventeenth-century

Present condition: Ruinous

Description:

As it stood before the fire of perhaps fifty years ago, the house was a story-and-a-half, gabled rectangle, 20 feet 7 inches deep by 50 feet 10½ inches long. At the front was a brick porch 10 feet square, and at the back a room 13 feet 4½ inches deep by 14 feet 5 inches wide. A photograph taken before the fire shows the building complete. On the center of the front was a gabled porch with an arched opening in the front and side walls. The head was half round with rubbed red brick, alternating headers and stretchers, with the outer header-brick glazed. Similar glazed brick was used for the field of the front wall of the porch, with red brick set in a pattern, and for all the headers of the main walls, which were laid in Flemish bond. The fenestration of the front consisted of a pair of large windows, one at either side of the porch, with a pair of smaller windows beyond. This arrangement was a familiar one in early homes, examples being the Galt House in Williamsburg and, formerly, Sweet Hall in King William County. There was a pair of basement windows under the main windows. These had segmental arched heads of rubbed and glazed brick, as probably the main windows had. This type of head was usual in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century buildings such as the Warburton House in James City County, and in Charles City County occurred in later buildings such as Westover and the Court House. The water table was merely a beveled offset of alternate headers and stretchers. There were two small gabled dormers on the roof.

On the end elevations the chimneys were set inside the end walls, but there was a slip joint between them and the walls and the bricks did not course. This indicates that the chimneys were part of an earlier house and may have belonged to the seventeenth-century Cocke House, often thought to be the later brick house. A part of a band of decorative glazed brickwork appears at the bottom of the west chimney, which stands only a few feet above the ground. This takes the form of connected lozenges. The fine glazed pattern of the east chimney is now covered with ivy, but an old photograph shows the form. (See plate 139, John Meade Howell's Lost Examples of Colonial Architecture, Helburn, 1931.) It consisted of two large lozenges one within the other, at the base, and in the gable two smaller lozenges one above the other.

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The gable was of very steep pitch and terminated in a large chimney stack. The slope of the roof at the eaves was sharply splayed. At the right of the chimney a small door occurred. The rear elevation lacks the small end windows and one of the basement windows. The projecting wing had suffered various changes, such as the rebuilding of the chimney and alterations to the east wall. The original design is not discernable.

The plan consisted of two unequal rooms in the main house, the partition occurring at the right or east side of the entrance.

The big room or hall was 17 feet 3 inches wide by about 23 feet long. At the side of the chimney breast were closets. The east room, except for the reduced length of about 15 feet, was similar.

There is no evidence of where the stair was located. It may have ascended in the northeast corner of the room, a position relating to stairs in early houses near Norfolk, or it may have been in the rear extension, as at Bacon's Castle, Surry County, Virginia.

The basement plan is similar to that of the first floor. At least the east room had a fireplace and this still remains. It is 5 feet 7 inches wide and was spanned by a segmental arch. The height is indefinite, as the floor is covered with debris. The flue is divided, the division wall being supported on a transverse parabolic arch.

Additional data:

Malvern Hill was the home of the Cocke family and is principally famous for the sanguinary battle fought on the slope of the hill in front of the house, July 1, 1862.

Reference: Virginia Guide, p. 629.

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Approved:

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